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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DECLARATION OF DISASTER: DISPLACEMENT OF ITSEKIRI AND IJAW VILLAGERS IN WARRI AREA, DELTA STATE

1. The Ambassador hereby declares the situation in the Warri North, Warri South, and Warri Southwest Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Delta State as a man-made disaster. In accordance with USAID/DCHA Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance guidance, the Ambassador requests immediate OFDA support of \$50,000 in order to provide emergency humanitarian relief assistance to the approximately 9,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in this area.

2. The affected LGAs are located in the Niger Delta, a region of the country that accounts for around 90 percent of Nigeria's export earnings and 80 percent of the government's revenue, but which remains one of the least developed regions in Nigeria with per capita income well below the national average of \$280. This disparity has contributed to a regular cycle of conflict in this oil-producing region over the past several years. However, this is the first time that the conflict has been so severe in its impact on the oil flows to the world market.

3. The current conflict between two major ethnic groups in the region, the Ijaws and the Itsekiri, was ostensibly provoked by the Ijaws' grievance over a recently redrawn division of electoral wards in the Warri Southwest LGA. The Ijaws are the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria and the new division has been perceived as giving rival Itsekiri political dominance over an area heavily populated by Ijaws. Fighting between the Nigerian military and Ijaw youth over illegal "bunkering" (theft by siphoning) of oil from pipelines is also seen as a contributing factor. Regardless of the true source of the conflict, starting on March 13, Ijaw youth attacked and razed 28 Itsekiri villages. In response, the Nigerian Navy and Army fired on Ijaw villages.

4. According to the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH) -- a U.S. NGO with office, staff and projects in Warri and the surrounding area -- the conflict has left approximately 8,000 Itsekiri IDPs living outdoors in common areas in Warri town and Sapele (about 45 kilometers north of Warri town) since mid-March: 2,500 of the Itsekiri IDPs are currently in Warri town and 5,500 are in Sapele. An additional 1,000 ethnic Ijaw IDPs are also living without shelter in Obe-Ijoh, the seat of Warri Southwest LGA. Itsekiri and Ijaw leaders generally confirm these figures.

5. On March 20, in response to the severity of violence associated with the conflict, both Chevron and Shell closed down wells and flow stations in the area and evacuated their personnel to Warri town, Port Harcourt and Lagos. Shell and Chevron also assisted in the evacuation of thousands of villagers displaced by the fighting. The resulting "shut-in" of oil production translated in the lost production of approximately 800,000 barrels/day, equal to more than one-percent of global demand and over 40 percent of Nigeria's production. Lost revenue to both the Nigerian government and the oil companies could exceed as much as \$1.5 billion.

6. Because of a lack of resources and a deep distrust of the government by the affected ethnic groups, the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Delta State Government are unable to fulfill the immediate humanitarian needs of these IDPs.

7. The Federal Government (Office of the Presidency) has been contacted formally and we anticipate shortly a response indicating GON acceptance of this USG (OFDA) disaster relief through a U.S. NGO.

18. Providing relief to address the humanitarian needs of those affected by this conflict is strongly in the USG's interest. The shut-down of oil production in this area adversely affected global oil supplies and prices: as the largest purchaser of Nigerian crude oil, the US is particularly sensitive to fluctuations in Nigeria's oil production. The Niger Delta is also home to the largest concentration of U.S. investment in continental Africa. More generally, mitigating a humanitarian emergency in the region will underscore U.S. concerns for the people of Nigeria in this strategically critical area.

19. Given, the lack of GON capacity to respond to the situation, the willingness of Nigeria's Federal Government to accept USG disaster relief through a U.S. NGO, and the strategic importance of the region to the U.S., this disaster relief request meets USAID/DCHA requirements for funding.

Why IFESH?

10. The Embassy proposes to use IFESH to respond to the immediate needs of the IDPs because it is uniquely positioned to provide this relief aid efficiently and equitably. IFESH is the only U.S. NGO operating in the affected swamplands of Delta State. It has earned the respect of both Ijaw and Itsekiri communities -- no easy feat in this conflict-plagued land -- implementing community development and conflict resolution activities with USAID and Chevron support. IFESH, founded by the late Reverend Leon Sullivan, is also well known to USAID throughout the world. Equally important, the Nigerian Red Cross -- the usual vehicle for delivery of disaster relief here -- is in our view unsuitable for the efficient and equitable disbursement of relief aid in this region. A prominent Itsekiri leader recently told the Embassy that her people would not trust the Red Cross because it is seen as an arm of the government and relatively unknown to the local communities. This view was echoed by Warri staff of IFESH.

11. According to an assessment provided by IFESH, an estimated 4,000 of the IDPs are in immediate need of bedding, clothing, food and counseling. IFESH workers in Warri claim that shelter material (e.g. tents or tarps) are not/not needed as the IDPs feel vulnerable to attack in these; the IDPs prefer and are using enclosed spaces such as public schools and sheltered stadiums. The projected budget for this OFDA relief assistance is as follows:

--500 sets of Bedding at Naira 4,000/set = \$15,335
--Food for 4,000 for 14 days at Naira 50/pp/pd = \$23,077
--4,000 sets of clothing at Naira 300/set = \$9,230
--Counseling at three sites = \$2,092
TOTAL: \$49,734.

12. Post will encourage Chevron, which already co-funds IFESH projects in the Delta, to contribute to the relief effort. In addition to the airlift provided to 2,000 IDPs from its operational compound, Chevron initially provided some food relief to the displaced. We will also encourage Shell, though not a U.S. company, to provide similar assistance.

13. If OFDA approves this request for disaster assistance, Post's USAID Mission would provide the funding directly to the Nigeria office of IFESH for immediate procurement of relief supplies on the local market. IFESH certifies its ability to find these items easily on the local market and asserts its capacity to deliver them in a timely and accountable manner to the desired IDP recipients. Full accounting and evaluation reports will be provided to the USAID MDRO by IFESH after the relief delivery is completed.

14. Points of contact for this request are: 1) Post's Mission Disaster Relief Officer (MDRO) Denise Rollins, at office: (234-9) 234-2175 or 234-2189; home: (234-9) 413-5740; cell phone: (234-803) 408-1034; e-mail: drollins@usaid.gov or denise.rollins@hotmail.com; and (2) Post's Corporate Responsibility Officer (CRO) Mark Taylor at 234-9-523-0916 or (cellphone) 234-80359-00448, email: TaylorMB2@state.gov.

